

UNHOLY LAND

ANARCHISM, NATIONALISM AND ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE

The Jewish masses in every country...have given unstintingly out of their earnings in the hope that Palestine may prove an asylum for their brothers, cruelly persecuted in nearly every European country. The fact that there are many non-Zionist communes in Palestine goes to prove that the Jewish workers who have helped the persecuted and hounded Jews have done so not because they are Zionists, but [so that Jews] might be left in peace in Palestine to take root and live their own lives...Perhaps my revolutionary education has been sadly neglected, but I have been taught that the land should belong to those who till the soil.

Emma Goldman, letter to *Spain and the World* (London, 1938)

This final chapter differs from its predecessors in opening up a relatively new and unexplored topic for anarchists – their attitude to anti-imperialist struggles abroad. In this debate, the prism of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is offered as a case study in which some of the most interesting theoretical issues that anarchists confront are refracted. This chapter asks which approaches would make sense for anarchists regarding such struggles, with which they often express solidarity despite their “nationalist” overtones. In this chapter I also employ a speaking voice that is now doubly engaged – as an Israeli anarchist activist/scholar. I begin with a critique of the scant anarchist polemical writing on Palestine/Israel,^{*} which is overwhelmingly “old school”, and criticise the authors’ lack of an action-oriented approach and adherence to antiquated formulations. Reviewing the traditional anarchist critique of nationalism, I then tackle what seems to be the overriding anarchist dilemma in the present context – the question of attitudes towards statehood, which has not received

* The terms Israel/Palestine and Palestine/Israel interchangeably refer to the land west of the Jordan river.

much attention in anarchist writing. Here, I examine four reasons why anarchists can, without contradiction, be seen to “support” the statist independence claims of an occupied people. I then analyse three “threads of intervention” in the social movement activity of anarchists and their allies in Israel/Palestine – linking issues, direct action and grassroots peacemaking – which can indicate directions for an anarchist strategy in the region.

Anarchism and Nationalism

With the conflict in Palestine/Israel so high on the public agenda, and with significant domestic and international anarchist involvement in Palestine solidarity campaigns (see later), it is surprising that the scant published anarchist contributions on the topic remain, at their best, irrelevant to the concrete experiences and dilemmas of movements in the region. At their worst, they depart from anarchism all together. Thus Wayne Price (2001) descends into very crude terms when proclaiming:

In the smoke and blood of Israel/Palestine these days, one point should be clear, that Israel is the oppressor and the Palestinian Arabs are the oppressed. Therefore anarchists, and all decent people, should be on the side of the Palestinians. Criticisms of their leaderships or their methods of fighting are all secondary; so is recognition that the Israeli Jews are also people and also have certain collective rights. The first step, always, is to stand with the oppressed as they fight for their freedom.

Asking all decent people to see someone else’s humanity and collective rights as secondary to anything – whatever this is, it is not anarchism. Why is Price’s recognition of oppression not extended to oppressed Israelis, who are aware of their oppression by the occupation and conflict and fight to end it? It should be pointed out

that no Israelis do so because they are “siding with the Palestinians”, but more likely out of a sense of injustice, responsibility and solidarity. For some of them who are anarchists, it is also in order to liberate *themselves* from living in what they see as a militaristic, racist, sexist and otherwise unequal society. Why is no distinction being made between Palestinian oppressed and oppressors, or between the Palestinian population and the Palestinian state-in-waiting? This is especially strange since Price is aware that “on both sides of the Israeli/Palestinian divide, there are conflicts within each nation: between rulers and ruled, between capitalists and workers, between patriarchy and women” and so on. However, he immediately forecloses the discussion by asserting, patronisingly, that “blind nationalism leads each nation to think of itself as a bloc and to see the other side as a bloc: the Arabs, the Jews – ignoring the splits inside each nation”. Again, all members of these nations “blind nationalists”, even those who consciously take sides in multiple social conflicts *within* Israeli and Palestinian societies? It is only Price who is ignoring these conflicts, failing to seek his potential allies within them. It is worrying to note that such crass insensitivities (and worse) are widespread in the broader Palestine solidarity movement in the North, much more than among Palestinians. This is a sample of what anarchist critics have recently pointed to as the reality of anti-Semitism in the Left (Austrian and Goldman 2003, Michaels 2004, Shot by both sides 2005).

Meanwhile, Price is so confident about having access to the just and appropriate resolution that he permits himself to issue elaborate programs and demands, down to the finer details of the situation:

Our [*sic!*] immediate demand is for the Israeli state to unilaterally withdraw from the occupied West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem...Any settlers who remain must accept that they live in an Arab country...The Israelis should announce that they will recognize any government (or other arrangement) set up by the Palestinians, and will negotiate the return of Palestinian refugees to Israel proper or arrange just compensation for property stolen...

Ultimately there will have to be some sort of "secular-democratic" or "binational" communal federation. And it will have to have some sort of self-managed non-capitalist economy...Meanwhile we must support the resistance of the Palestinian people. They have the right to self-determination, that is, to choose their leaders, their programs, and their methods of struggle, whatever we think.

A blank cheque, then, to any and every Palestinian elite under the banner of democracy. The statement's imperative tone also begs the question. To whom, precisely, are Price's "we" supposed to be issuing such elaborate demands? To the Israeli state, backed perhaps by the potent threat of embassy occupations and boycotts on oranges and software? Or maybe to the international community, or to the American state for that matter? In all cases this would be a "politics of demand" which extends state power undue recognition and legitimation through the act of demand itself – an approach far removed from central anarchist concerns and strategies.

In a rebuttal to Price, Ryan Chiang McCarthy (2002) takes issue with the lack of distinction between peoples and their rulers, and makes another encouraging step in calling for solidarity with libertarian forces on the ground. Unfortunately, he extends such solidarity only to struggles which fall within his prejudiced syndicalist gaze: "autonomous labor movements of Palestinian and Israeli workers...A workers' movement that bypasses the narrow lines of struggle...and fights for the unmediated demands of workers". Besides being entirely detached from reality – the prospects for autonomous labour movements are as bleak in Israel/Palestine as they are in the rest of the developed world – such a workerist myopia (or fetish) is also directly harmful.

It reproduces the invisibility of the many important struggles in Palestine/Israel that do not revolve around work, and in which most anarchists happen to be participating. Meanwhile, stubborn class reductionism demarcates no less narrow lines of struggle than the ones which it criticises, and does the protagonists violence by forcing their actions into artificial frameworks. Thus Palestinians and Israelis are first and foremost “workers...manipulated by their rulers to massacre one another”; army refusal is a “sparkling [act] of class solidarity carried out across national lines” (most refuseniks are middle-class and self-declared Zionists); while “the nationalist poison...drives Palestinian proletarian youth to destroy themselves and Israeli fellow workers in suicide bombings”. This may be anarchism, but it is of a fossilised variety.

The root of the problem, it would seem, is that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict introduces complexities that are not easily addressed from a traditional anarchist standpoint. The tension between anarchists’ anti-imperialist commitments on the one hand, and their traditional rebuttal of the state and nationalism on the other, would seem to leave them at an impasse from which they can only fall back on the one-size-fits-all formulae of class struggle, or otherwise disengage from the debate altogether. In order to understand why this is so, let me look at anarchist critiques of nationalism.

Prevalent in anarchist literature is an epistemological distinction between the state and the nation (people, folk), the former understood as an artificial institution and the latter a natural grouping arising from shared ethnic, linguistic and/or cultural characteristics. elaborate statement of this distinction was made by Gustav Landauer, who saw in the folk an organic entity based on the uniquely shared spirit (*Geist*) – feelings, ideals, values, language, and beliefs – that unifies individuals into a

community. For Landauer, the folk spirit is the basis for community, existed before the state and would return to do so in a free society. The presence of the state is what prevents such spirit from realising itself as “an equality of individuals – a feeling and reality – which is brought about in free spirit to unity and union” (Landauer 1907). Landauer also considered it possible to have several identities – he saw himself as a Jew, a German and a *southern* German. Elsewhere he wrote,

I am happy about every imponderable and ineffable thing that brings about exclusive bonds, unities, and also differentiations within humanity. If I want to transform patriotism then I do not proceed in the slightest against the fine fact of the nation...but against the mixing up of the nation and the state, against the confusion of differentiation and opposition (in Lunn 1973:263).

Michael Bakunin (1871:324) had earlier argued that the “fatherland” [patria] represents a “manner of living and feeling” – that is, a local culture – which is “always an incontestable result of a long historic development”. As such, the deep love of fatherland among the “common people...is a natural, real love”. While the feeling of common belonging, most typically to a land, was in no way rejected by Bakunin (or by many other anarchists), it was its “corruption” under statist institutions that they rejected as “nationalism” – a primary loyalty to one’s *nation-state*. Thus for Bakunin “political patriotism, or love of the State, is not the faithful expression” of how the common people love the fatherland, but rather an expression “distorted by means of false abstraction, always for the benefit of an exploiting minority”.

Rudolf Rocker adopted Landauer’s distinction in his *Nationalism and Culture*. A folk is defined as “the natural result of social union, a mutual association of men brought about by a certain similarity of external conditions of living, a common

language, and special characteristics due to climate and geographic environment (Rocker 1937:200-1). However, Rocker clarifies that it is only possible to speak of the folk, as an entity, in terms that are location- and time-specific. This is because, over time, “cultural reconstructions and social stimulation always occur when different peoples and races come into closer union. Every new culture is begun by such a fusion of different folk elements and takes its special shape from this” (346). What Rocker calls the “nation”, on the other hand, is the essentialist idea of a unified community of interest, spirit or race. This he sees as a creation of the state. Thus, like Landauer and Bakunin, it was the primary loyalty to one’s nation state that Rocker sanctioned *as* “nationalism”. At the same time, the traditional anarchist position expected that, unencumbered by the state, a space would be open for the self-determination and mutually-fertilising development of local folk cultures.

These attitudes to nationalism, however, had as their primary reference point the European nationalisms associated with existing states. The issue of nationalism in the national liberation struggles of stateless peoples received less attention. Kropotkin, for example, saw national liberation movements positively, arguing the removal of foreign domination was a precondition to the workers’ realising their social consciousness (in Grauer 1994). However, what may be a necessary condition is by no means a sufficient one, and it could equally be argued that national liberation efforts can only end up creating new state-sponsored nationalisms.

With the case of Israel/Palestine the dilemma is essentially the same. The overwhelming majority of Palestinians want a state of their own alongside Israel. But how can anarchists who support the Palestinian struggle reconcile this with their anti-

statist principles? How can they support the creation of yet another state in the name of “national liberation”, which is the explicit or implicit agenda of almost all Palestinians? What is at work here is anarchists’ critique that in their national liberation efforts, Palestinians are bowing to the idea that the state is a desirable institution, and lending themselves to nationalist illusions fostered by Palestinian elites, who will only become the source of their future oppression. This is the logic behind McCarthy’s stance, as well as by other anarchists who state that “we support the fight of the Palestinian people...[and] stand with those Israelis who protest against the racist government...What we cannot do is support the creation of yet another state in the name of ‘national liberation’” (Solidarity Federation 2002).

But there are two problems with such an attitude. First, it invites the charge of paternalism, whereby anarchists are pretending to be better than Palestinians at discerning their “real interests”, while jettisoning the need for solidarity to happen on the terms articulated by the oppressed. Second, and more importantly, it leaves anarchists with nothing but empty declarations to the effect that that “we stand with and support all those who are being oppressed by those who have the power to do so” (ibid.), or that “it is not about forcing the Israeli state to respect the rights of Palestinians, nor supporting the formation of a new Palestinian state. Rather it is a question of starting to practice desertion, refusal, sabotage, attack, destruction against every constituted authority, all power, every state” (Friends of Al-Halladj 2002) . Again, while such sentiments are certainly in tune with longer-term anarchist aspirations, they also consign anarchists to a position of irrelevance in the present tense. On the one hand, anarchists could certainly agree that the establishment of a capitalist

Palestinian state through negotiations among existing and would-be governments would only mean “the submission of the Intifada to a comprador Palestinian leadership that will serve Israel...[This is] related to processes occurring all over the world under the label of globalization, and to initiatives for regional trade cooperation designed to culminate in a ‘free trade region of all Mediterranean countries’...economic hardship and social gaps will increase, the refugee problem will remain unsolved” (Anarchist Communist Initiative 2005). On the other hand, by disengaging from concrete Palestinian demands for a state these Israeli old-school anarchists have nothing to propose except “the demand for an entirely different way of life and equality for all the inhabitants of the region...a classless anarchist-communist society”. This is all well and good, but what happens in the meantime?

“Supporting” Statehood?

While anarchists can surely do something more specific in solidarity with Palestinians than just saying that “we need a revolution”, any such action would appear hopelessly “contaminated” with a statist agenda. The fact that anarchists nevertheless engage in on-the-ground actions of solidarity with Palestinian communities and groups requires us to grip this particular bull by its horns. Here, I believe there are at least four coherent ways in which anarchists can deal with the current dilemma.

The first and most pragmatic response is to acknowledge that there is indeed a contradiction here, but to insist that in a liminal, imperfect situation, solidarity is still

worthwhile even if it comes at the price of inconsistency. Endorsement of Palestinian statehood by anarchists can be seen as a pragmatic position based on anti-imperialist commitments or even basic humanitarian concern. It doesn't do anybody any good to say to the Palestinians, "sorry, we'll let you remain non-citizens of a brutal occupation until after we're done abolishing capitalism". For this reason, one can see some kind of representative statehood for the Palestinians as the only short term solution, however imperfect, to their current oppression. Here anarchists recognise an unresolved tension in their politics, but a specific value judgement is made whereby one's anti-imperialist or humanitarian commitments are seen to take precedence over an otherwise fully uncompromising anti-statism. Attached to this is an interpretation of solidarity which is "not about supporting those who share your precise politics. It's about supporting those who struggle against injustice – even if their assumptions, methods, politics, and goals differ from our own" (ISM Canada 2004).

A second and separate response is to say that in fact anarchists can, without contradiction, support the establishment of a new Palestinian state. This is for the simple reason that Palestinians are already living under a state – Israel – and that the formation of a new Palestinian state creates only a quantitative change, not a qualitative one. Anarchists object to the state as a general scheme of social relations – not to this or the other state, but to the principle behind them all. It is a misunderstanding to reduce this objection to quantitative terms – the number of states in the world adds or subtracts nothing from anarchists' assessment of how closely the world corresponds to their ideals. Having one single world state, for example, would be as problematic for anarchists as the present situation (if not more so), although the

process of creating it would have abolished some 190 states. So from a purely anti-statist anarchist perspective, for Palestinians to live under a Palestinian state rather than an Israeli state would be, at worst, just as objectionable. In such a situation, the pragmatic considerations mentioned in the first response above are no longer viewed as a trade-off, but as an entirely positive development. If the choice is between an Israeli or a Palestinian state controlling the West Bank and Gaza, while the basic objectionable social relations remain static, then clearly the latter option is purely preferable. A future Palestinian state, despite maintaining the basic scheme of statist social relations, and no matter how corrupt or authoritarian, would in any event be less brutal than the Israeli state is currently behaving towards the Palestinian population. Control by a civilian authority, though far worse than anarchy, is still far better than the military authority of Israel with its relentless humiliation and control over much of Palestinians' everyday lives.

One point to recognize in this discussion is that states (particularly nation-states) are consistently hostile to stateless peoples (and nomads). The Jews in pre-WWII Europe and the Palestinians are two among many examples of oppressed stateless peoples in the modern era. Note that while many Jews were citizens (often second-class citizens) of European countries at the beginning of the twentieth century, an important precondition for the Holocaust was the deprivation of Jews' citizenships, rendering them stateless. So here we may perhaps reiterate the fundamental anarchist dilemma around statehood – why do the oppressed always seek after their own mini-Leviathan? (Perlman 1983a)

A third response, informed by Kropotkin's note above, is taken in reference to the need to transcend this cycle. It is to say that anarchists can support a Palestinian state as a strategic choice, a desirable stage in a longer-term struggle. No-one can sincerely expect that the situation in Israel/Palestine will move from the present one to anarchy in one smooth, uninterrupted process. Hence, the establishment of a Palestinian state through a peace treaty with the Israeli state, although far from a "solution", may turn out to be a positive development on the way to more thoroughgoing revolutionary targets. The reduction of everyday violence on both sides could do a great deal to open the necessary political space for further struggles, and would thus constitute a positive development from a strategic point of view. In the region at present, all other anarchist agendas (anti-capitalism, feminism, ecology etc.) are subsumed under the ongoing conflict. While the fighting continues, it is impossible to even engage with people on broader issues and social struggles since the conflict silences them out. Thus, the establishment of a Palestinian state would form a bridgehead towards the flowering of other myriad social struggles, in Israel and in whatever enclave-polity emerges under the Palestinian ruling elite. For anarchists, such a process would be a significant step forward in a longer-term strategy for the destruction of the Israeli, Palestinian, and all other states along with capitalism, patriarchy and so on.

A fourth response would be to alter the terms of discussion altogether, by arguing that whether or not anarchists support a Palestinian state is an entirely insignificant matter, and thus constitutes what many activists would call a "false debate". What exactly are anarchists supposed to do with this support? If the debate is to resolve itself in a meaningful direction, then the ultimate question is whether anarchists can

and should *take action* in support of a Palestinian state. But what could such action possibly be, short of petitions, demonstrations, and other elements of the “politics of demand” that anarchists seek to transcend? One can hardly establish a state through direct action, and the politicians who actually get to decide whether or not a Palestinian state is finally established aren’t exactly asking anarchists their opinion. Seen in this light, debates about whether anarchists should give their short-term “support” to a Palestinian state sound increasingly ridiculous, since the only merit of such discussion would be to come up with a common platform. Thus, it can be argued, anarchists may take actions of solidarity with Palestinians (as well as Tibetan, West Papuan and Sahrawi people) without reference to the question of statehood. The everyday acts of resistance that anarchists join and defend in Palestine and Israel are immediate steps to help preserve people’s livelihoods and dignity, which are in no way necessarily connected to a statist project. It is doubtful whether the Palestinians whom anarchists join in removing a roadblock, or in harvesting their olives while threatened by settlers, are doing so while consciously seeing it as a step towards statehood. The point is that, once viewed from a longer-term strategic perspective, anarchists’ actions have worthwhile implications whether or not they are attached to a statist agenda of independence.

With this approach in mind, it would seem that the most fruitful avenue for further inquiry would be to analyse what anarchists and their allies are already doing on the ground. Then the key questions become: Which forms of involvement in the struggles in Palestine/Israel point most clearly towards *relevant* anarchist strategies and approaches?

Three Threads of Intervention

In looking at the landscape of struggle against the occupation, one should be aware that the anarchist presence on the ground is scarce and unevenly distributed. On a reasonable estimation, there are up to 300 people in Israel who are politically active and who wouldn't mind calling themselves anarchists – most of them Jewish women and men between the ages of 16-35.* Among Palestinians there are a few kindred souls and many allies, but no active anarchist movement. To this is added the presence of some anarchists in international solidarity efforts on the ground, primarily through the Palestinian-led International Solidarity Movement (ISM). Despite their small numbers, however, anarchists and their immediate allies have had a great deal of impact. Here, three interwoven threads of intervention stand out, in which facets of anarchist politics emerge in a unique local environment.

* Though not nominally anarchist, and lacking links to the vast Yiddish-speaking anarchist movement in Europe and America (Cohn 2005), a great many of the c.40,000 East European Jewish settlers in the second wave of emigration to Palestine (1904-1914) were committed to a libertarian and socialist ethos and way of life. This was expressed in the fully voluntarist, stateless communities that were the early *kvutzot* (predecessors of the kibbutz). Anarchist literature “was quite common” among kibbutz founders since before the first World War, specifically Kropotkin's ideas (Oved 2000). These were propagated among others by Joseph Trumpeldor, who identified as an “anarcho-communist and a Zionist”. A self-professed anarchist, Aharon Shidlovsky, was one of the founders of *kvutzat* Kinneret. Aharon David Gordon, the “guru” of *kvutzat* Degania, objected to volunteering for the British army during WW1, did not mention a Jewish state even once in his dozens of articles, and anticipated contemporary eco-anarchist thinking in his anti-Marxist, anti-romantic critique of modernity (Gordon 1956). Anarchist trends proliferated in the *Hapoel HaTzair* (“The Young Labourer”) movement, for whose magazine Gordon mostly wrote. The movement published Kropotkin in Hebrew and came into contact, through Martin Buber, with the ideas of Gustav Landauer. However, from the late twenties the period of movement and party institutionalization in Palestine buried these anarchist influences. As the central institutions of the Zionist state-in-waiting established their monopoly over the circulation of seed and produce, the *kibbutzim* lost their status as *autonomous* communes, and were later fully co-opted into the local capitalist economy (many of them are today privatised). There is thus no direct continuity between this precedent and contemporary Israeli anarchism.

Linking Issues

Perhaps the most obvious strength of the new anarchism, globally speaking, is its multi-issue platform, a conscious agenda of integrating diverse struggles. In genealogical terms, this platform derives from the rootedness of the contemporary movement in the intersection of different social struggles. In theoretical terms, this intersection is grounded in anarchists' stress on domination and hierarchy as the basis of multiple injustices. By creating networks that integrate the different movements and constituencies in which they are active, anarchists can facilitate recognition and mutual aid among struggles.

This strand is clearly present in the activities of anarchist and other radical movements in Israel/Palestine, where it comes into unique local configurations. As a result of their activity, more profound and aware connections are being made between the occupation, the widening social gap between rich and poor, the exploitation of foreign and domestic workers, the status of women, racism and ethnic discrimination, homophobia, pollution and consumerism.

One example of linking the struggle against the occupation to a different liberatory agenda is the activity of Kvisa Shchora (Black Laundry) – a direct action group of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders and others against the occupation and for social justice. It was created for the Pride Day parade in Tel-Aviv in 2001, a few months after the second Intifada began. Jamming the by-now depoliticised and commercialised celebration, about 250 radical queers in black joined the march under the banner “No Pride in the Occupation”. Since then, the group has undertaken actions and outreach with a strongly anti-authoritarian orientation, which “stress the

connection between different forms of oppression...The oppression of different minorities in the state of Israel feeds on the same racism, the same chauvinism, and the same militarism that uphold the oppression and occupation of the Palestinian people. There cannot be true freedom in an oppressive, occupying society. In a military society there is no place for the different and weak; lesbians, Gay men, drag queens, transsexuals, foreign workers, women, Mizrahi Israelis [of Middle Eastern or North African descent], Arabs, Palestinians, the poor, the disabled and others" (Black Laundry 2001). Kvisa Shchora's multi-issue politics places it in a dual role: on the one hand promoting solidarity with Palestinians, as well as anti-capitalism and antagonistic politics, in the mainstream LGBT community; and on the other hand stressing queer liberation in the movement against the occupation. According to one member, while many activists did not initially understand the significance of queers demonstrating as queers against the occupation, "after many actions and discussions our visibility is now accepted and welcome. This, I can't really say about our Palestinian partners, so in the territories we usually go back to the closet" (Ayalon 2004). The latter reality has also led Kvisa to engage in direct solidarity and support for Palestinian queers, who find even less acceptance in their society than Israeli queers do.

Ma'avak Ehad (One Struggle) is an affinity group combining explicit anarchism and an animal liberation agenda, whose members are also very active in anti-occupation struggles. Again this combination of agendas is there with the explicit goal of "highlighting the connection between all different forms of oppression, and hence also of the various struggles against them" (One Struggle 2002). Ma'avak Ehad's

explicit anti-capitalist and ecological agenda also adds a rare radical critique of the relationship between capitalism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While the latter is well researched on the economic level (Nitzan and Bichler 2002), awareness of these connections is far from widespread in public discourse, going only as far as political rhetoric like “money for social services, not for the settlements!”. The group’s emphasis on animal liberation again creates a critical bridge: calling attention to animal rights within peace and social justice movements, but also encouraging resistance to the occupation in the vegetarian and vegan community. Activities such as Food Not Bombs stalls, which create meaningful connections between poverty, militarism and animal exploitation, are highly poignant in an Israeli context. In addition, members of this group became the core of the direct-action group “Anarchists against the Wall” (see below).

A third example in this thread is New Profile, a feminist organization that challenges Israel’s militarised social order. Its activities fall into two categories. First, it does educational work around the connections between militarism in Israeli society and patriarchy, inequalities and social violence, and acts to “disseminate and realize feminist-democratic principles in Israeli education by changing a system that promotes unquestioning obedience and glorification of military service” (Aviram 2003). Activities in this area include debates in schools that promote critical, non-hierarchical thinking and workshops on consensus, conflict resolution and democratic process for groups. In its second role, New Profile is the most radical among the four Israeli refusenik groups, and the one through which anarchists refusing military service predominantly organise. The group campaigns for the right to conscientious

objection, and its website has full guides to refusal for both men and women. It operates a network of support “buddies” for refuseniks before, during and after jail, and arranges seminars for youth who are still dwelling on whether or not to refuse or evade service. Currently there is a campaigning drive to support and recognise the struggle of women refuseniks. The group’s radical feminist/anti-militarist stance, besides being an important message to society, also creates a meaningful bridge between feminists and the refusenik movement. This bridge is also critical, since it challenges the core narratives to which most refuseniks – predominantly mainstream left-Zionist males – continue to adhere.

Non-violent Direct Action

A second thread of intervention in Palestine/Israel that is of particular interest to anarchists is civil disobedience and non-violent direct action, which enjoy an increasing presence in anti-occupation struggles. Such tactics are clearly central to the anarchist political repertoire, with their emphasis on unmediated action to change reality – be it to destroy and prevent or to create and enable – rather than appealing to an external agent to wield power on one’s behalf. However, this thread is more knotted than the previous one, and requires some background.

The most prominent site of anarchist involvement in civil disobedience and direct action in Israel/Palestine is everyday support for Palestinian non-violent resistance. Such actions include anything from removing roadblocks and breaking curfews through obstructing bulldozers and squatting seized land and on to assisting and defending olive harvests against the military and settlers. The central organ for these

activities has been the Palestinian-led ISM, which largely became active before the height of the Israeli state's invasions and attacks on Palestinian population centres (Sandercock et.al 2004). Its first campaign, in August 2001, included forming human chains to block soldiers from interfering while Palestinians tore down military roadblocks, held mass demonstrations, or collectively broke curfews to go to school or harvest olives or play soccer. As the violence escalated, the ISM was driven to focus more and more on accompaniment and human-shielding while at the same time drawing world attention to the repression of Palestinians through the "live" presence of international witnesses. During the spring 2002 invasions, at a time where more proactive involvement would inevitably be suppressed with deadly force, ISM activists stayed in Palestinian homes facing demolition, rode with ambulances, escorted municipal workers to fix infrastructure, and delivered food and medicine to besieged communities. In what was perhaps the most widely-broadcast drama of this phase, internationals were holed-up for weeks days in the besieged Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem with residents, clergymen and armed militants. For a while, what internationals did was dictated by when, where, and how the Israeli army would attack. As the violence ebbed, however, the emphasis on defensive operations diminished (though continuing army incursions such as the one during which Rachel Corrie was killed in March 2003 still maintain the need for them). The ISM now turned proactive again, with demonstrations to break curfews and an international day of action in summer 2002, subsequent work in olive harvests, and, since the end of that year, actions around the Israeli "Separation Barrier" (cf. PENGON 2003). ISM organisers estimate that between a quarter and a third of volunteers have been Jewish.

Now while clearly the ISM and similar solidarity groups are not nominally anarchist, and include a large and divergent array of participants from a wide range of backgrounds, two clear connections to anarchism can nevertheless be made. First, in terms of the identity of participants, international solidarity activities in Palestine have seen a major and sustained presence of anarchists, who had earlier cut their teeth on anti-capitalist mobilisations and local grassroots organising in North America and Europe. Thus, these networks constitute the foremost vehicle for on-the-ground involvement of international anarchists in Palestine. Second, and more substantially, it may be argued that the main source of anarchist affinities with the ISM is that it prominently displays many of the hallmarks of anarchist political culture: the lack of formal membership, comprehensive “policy” and official leadership groups; a decentralised organising model based on autonomous affinity groups, spokescouncils and consensus decision-making; and a strategic focus on short-term campaigns and creative tactics that stress direct action and grassroots empowerment. These affinities are evinced by a statement from ISM Canada (ibid.) on the need to move “from an arrogant ‘saviour’ model of activism, to a real ‘solidarity’ model of activism”. The emphasis on direct action contains many keywords of anarchist political language:

Solidarity means more than “charity” work to ease our conscience. It must also do more than simply *witness* or *document* atrocities – though these tasks are also critical to our work. The ISM views solidarity as an imperative to *actively engage* in resistance to the Occupation, to take sides, to put our bodies on the line, and to use the relative privilege of our passports and, in some cases, colour – first and foremost, in ways that Palestinians actually request, but also in ways which help build trust and expand networks of mutual aid.

It should be emphasised, however, that these anarchist affinities are not the result of any direct influence on part of the Western anarchist movement. Rather, they are a

point of convergence between anarchism and the endemic Palestinian tradition of popular resistance. Palestinians have a long-standing orientation towards civil disobedience and non-violent action, which have continued since the first Intifada – an uprising organised through popular committees and largely in detachment from the PLO leadership, involving massive demonstrations, general strikes, tax refusal, boycotts of Israeli products, political graffiti and the establishment of underground schools and grassroots mutual aid projects.

Hence, the first point to be made about the particulars of anarchist involvement in direct action in Palestine relates to its strong display of anti-vanguardism. In all of these actions, anarchists and their allies have deliberately participated as followers and supporters rather than equals. The ethos of the ISM and other solidarity groups stresses taking the lead from Palestinian community members or representatives, based on the principle that decision-making and control of actions should be in proportion to the degree to which one is affected by the potential outcome. As a result, ISMers have been careful to emphasise that “internationals cannot behave as if they are coming to teach Palestinians *anything* about ‘peace’ or ‘non-violence’ or ‘morality’ or ‘democracy,’ or anything else that many in the West typically (and arrogantly and mistakenly) view as the exclusive realm of Western activism and values” (ibid.). The same logic has been applied to the ideas of disobedience and direct action. In such a setting, any attempt at a *defining* contribution in terms of direct action – say, by way of implanting tactics garnered from Western models – would strike anarchists as an arrogant intervention. So in this case the anarchist connection happens more in terms of support for forms of popular resistance towards which anarchists experience an

immediate affinity, rather than in terms of anarchists explicitly “introducing” their own politics into a new arena.

A second point regards the special intersection, in the current context, between direct action and questions of political violence. While recognising the legitimacy of organized, armed insurrection (though not of targeting civilians), the ISM itself participates only in already existing non-violent acts resistance by Palestinians. This has the goal of giving visibility to the non-violent aspects of Palestinian struggle, which in fact constitute the bulk their activity against the occupation, and with which Western audiences can more easily identify. Now this position provides an interesting counterpoint to the debates around violence in European and North American anarchist circles. As I mentioned in chapter 6, the rhetorical move towards a “diversity of tactics” places anarchists in a more comfortable position than strictly non-violent activists regarding the landscape of struggle in Palestine/Israel. Here, however, the non-violent aspect of direct action plays an entirely different role, since it takes place against the backdrop of a highly *violent* conflict, in which armed struggle is the norm rather than the exception (even the first Intifada, in addition to the non-violent means mentioned above, also involved stone throwing, Molotov cocktails and the erection of barricades to impede the movement of the Israeli army). By engaging only in non-violent forms of action while not denouncing armed resistance, the ISM has, after its own fashion, also adopted a diversity of tactics position. Where supporters of a more strict, ideological version of non-violence (e.g. in the Gandhian tradition) might experience a deep conflict with such a position, Western anarchists who have distanced themselves from strict non-violence can more comfortably accept it –

although in this case it is *they* who take on the non-violent option. In Palestine, then, anarchists have found themselves inhabiting the other side of the “diversity of tactics” equation, counteracting the charge that this formulation is merely a euphemism for violence (Lakey 2002) by showing that they too are committed to engage in purely non-violent actions under some conditions.

The development of such an agenda is an area in which the experiences of Israeli anarchists are especially important. Many Israelis have been engaged in Palestinian solidarity activities for decades, including in civil disobedience and non-violent direct action during the current *intifada*. The appearance of Israelis taking direct action along with Palestinians has, over time, destabilised the unquestioned legitimacy impacted the public sensibilities in Israel to a degree which international activists could never had managed. This is not so much due to the type of actions – which are essentially the same – as to the identity of the participants. Such actions taken by Israelis are far more transgressive and provocative in the eyes of the Israeli public, which is not accustomed to seeing its own citizens put their bodies on the line in support of Palestinian rights. Grassroots Palestinian leaders are interested in furthering such cooperation in order to influence public opinion in Israel, and more especially because the presence of Israelis, they hope, will moderate the reactions of the soldiers.

Two years into the new Intifada, some Israelis who were cooperating on direct action with ISM affinity groups and with other internationals increasingly felt the need to give more visibility to their own resistance as Israelis, by creating an autonomous group working together with Palestinians and internationals (Ayalon 2004). After a few actions against the Wall in Israel and Palestine, a small group

started to come together and build a trusted reputation of Israeli direct-action activists willing to struggle together with local Palestinians against the Wall. In March 2003 the village of Mas'ha invited the group to build a protest tent on village land that was being confiscated for the Wall (98% of Mas'ha land was taken). The protest camp was created and became a centre of struggle and information against the planned construction in that area and in the whole West Bank. Over the four months of the camp more than a thousand internationals and Israelis came to learn about the situation and join the struggle. During the camp a direct-action group calling itself "Anarchists Against the Wall" (also known as "Jews Against Ghettos") was created. After the eviction of the Mas'ha camp in summer 2003 amid ninety arrests, the group continued to participate in many joint actions across the territories. "Members" of the group, with about one hundred active participants overall (Anonymous⁶ 2004), were present at demonstrations and actions on a weekly basis in 2004, for example in Salem (July), Anin and Kafr Zeita (August) and Zabube (9 November). The latter action was taken on an international day of action against the Wall (also the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall). Some thirty Israeli anarchists joined the Palestinian villagers in tearing down about twenty meters of the new separation fence. In other actions, gates along the barrier have been broken through.

Ironically, these actions remained largely invisible to the Israeli public until the army escalated its tactics. On December 26, 2003 an Israeli anarchist demonstrating against the fence, Gil Na'amati, was shot in the thigh by Israeli soldiers at Mas'ha and sustained serious blood loss. At two subsequent events, an anarchist was shot very near the eye by a rubber-coated metal bullet, and another was thrown for a 50kph ride

on the hood of an army jeep (Lavie 2004). The Israeli state's use of lethal violence against its own citizens made Israeli resistance to the Wall dramatically visible, and grew into a fierce debate about the army's use of deadly force against unarmed protesters. The commander of the soldiers who opened fire only fuelled the argument that raged in Israel's press yesterday by telling a local reporter: "The troops didn't know they were Israelis" – raising the issue of a perceived double standard on how the army deals with the Palestinians and its own citizens. Although the corporate media funnelled the debate into one over the army's tactics, more space for public debate was opened up around the Wall, while the Israeli army's already well-shaken pretensions to be "the most moral army in the world" suffered another blow.

While the majority of the public certainly views Israeli anarchists as misguided, naïve youth at best and as traitors at worst, it is impossible to deny that their direct actions have had an unprecedented impact on the discourse of wider Israeli society, especially around the Wall. Israeli-Palestinian cooperation in militant action is inherently transgressive because it enacts a dramatic, 90-degree flip of perspective (from horizontal to vertical). When both Palestinians and Israelis join in confronting the state, the horizontal imagery of national conflict is displaced by the vertical one of social struggle, "the people's side against the governments' side".

Grassroots Peace-making

This leads us to the third and possibly most important thread of intervention, European and North American anarchists have long been aware of the need to complement destructive/preventative direct action with constructive/enabling forms

of the same. However, the context in which the latter are discussed and used has been predominantly social and economic, with examples ranging from squats and social centres through urban food-gardening and self-help groups and on to cooperatives and LETS systems. The unique situation in Israel/Palestine allows us to glimpse the further potentialities of this logic in a setting of “national conflict”. Here, a third thread of anarchist intervention may be spoken of, whereby the direct action logic on its constructive mode is extended towards projects of grassroots peacemaking.

Israeli citizens cannot legally enter the West Bank or Gaza. Citizens of the West Bank and Gaza cannot legally enter Israel. The only Israelis that many Palestinians get to see are the army. The only Palestinians that many Israelis get to see are on TV. This reality obviously fosters mutual ignorance, fear and hatred on both sides. Paradoxically, however, for most Jewish Israelis, the notion of peace is strongly associated with the notion of separation. Ehud Barak’s central slogan in his 1999 election campaign was “physical separation from the Palestinians – us here, them there”. Thus the refusal to reinforce separation works against the grain of mainstream discourse. It should be appreciated that the Israeli government’s name for the barrier, the “separation” fence or wall, signifies something *positive* for many Israelis. Most of the Israeli “peace camp” has a problem with the wall, but would be satisfied if its route were to overlap perfectly with the Green Line, say, as a border between two states. Possibly many Palestinians would agree. However, this idea too needs to be challenged by anarchists and others who support a genuine peace in the region. This is because conditions of physical separation cannot make for the true reconciliation that is required by a more thoroughgoing notion of peace. The latter would go beyond

a “permanent armistice” and signify the full normalisation of relations between Palestinians and Israelis, where coexistence is a relationship bereft of all fear, suspicion and distance.

Many grassroots peacemaking efforts are oriented in this direction. One example is the organisation Ta’ayush (Arab-Jewish Partnership), created after the beginning of the 2nd Intifada. That month was one of the only cases when Palestinians who live in Israel actively resisted and raised their voices in solidarity with those in the occupied territories. Ta’ayush has a large membership of Jews and Palestinian Arabs of Israeli citizenship, including many students, and undertakes many actions in the territories – bringing food to the towns and helping farmers to work their land. A more communal example is Neve Shalom / Wahat al-Salaam, a cooperative village of Jewish and Palestinian Israelis, situated equidistant between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv-Jaffa. Founded in 1972, the village now houses about 50 families and operates Israel’s first fully bilingual regional school, with 290 Jewish and Arab children. The residents also have been organizing projects to help Palestinians in the West Bank with distribution of food and medical attention. Overall, the network of organisations for Jewish-Arab coexistence in Israel already lists over one hundred groups, from lobbying and advocacy groups through educational and artistic projects and on to local citizens’ fora in mixed cities and regions. However, unlike Ta’ayush, many of these initiatives explicitly designate themselves as “a-political”, sidestepping the obligation to confront social inequalities in Palestine/Israel, seeing themselves as “civil society” initiatives which supplement rather than challenge basic political and social structures.

A specific anarchist contribution to this thread of intervention, then, is to infuse it with a more clearly antagonistic dimension. What anarchists especially contribute to grassroots peacemaking is to undertake projects within its fold, on their own or in cooperation with others, while maintaining a stance of refusal towards state power. Thus community peacemaking, as a form of politician-bypassing direct action, at least has the potential for generating further joint struggles and a deeper awareness of how collective oppression and trauma are at work on both sides.

In a highly-evocative article, Bill Templer (2003) points to one version of what this could look like, using many keywords that will be well familiar by now:

Reinventing politics in Israel and Palestine means laying the groundwork *now* for a kind of Jewish-Palestinian Zapatismo, a grassroots effort to “reclaim the commons”. This would mean moving towards direct democracy, a participatory economy and a genuine autonomy for the people; towards Martin Buber’s vision of “an organic commonwealth...that is a community of communities” (1958: 136). We might call it the “no-state solution”.

Templer’s optimism for such a project rests on the perception of a widespread crisis of faith in “neoliberal governmentality”, making Israel/Palestine “a microcosm of the pervasive vacuity of our received political imaginaries and the ruling elites that administer them...[but which] offers a unique microlaboratory for experimenting with another kind of polity”. While acknowledging the inevitability of a two-state settlement in the short term, he traces elements which are already turning Palestine/Israel into “an incubator for creating ‘dual power’ over the middle term, ‘hollowing out’ capitalist structures and top-down bureaucracies”. Templer’s speculations on a “staged transformation”, a kind of two states – one state – no states transition, are perhaps going a bit too far. As far as longer-term transitions go,

anarchists might prefer to do without the one-statist transition period, envisioning the decomposition of all East Mediterranean states and capitalisms into networks of autonomous communities (“organic” or otherwise).

The point, however, is the grassroots grounding of the process itself. Realistically speaking, then, we are looking to the activities of groups and communities that can contaminate the two-statist peace process with a more thoroughgoing agenda of social transformation. What grounds such an agenda, from an anarchist perspective, is the argument that the creation of genuine peace requires the creation and fostering of political spaces which facilitate voluntary cooperation and mutual aid between Israelis and Palestinians. This holds even in the face of the resistance of the Israeli government, and beyond any “agreement” brokered by political rackets. Indeed, even if the Israeli government suddenly allowed for peace and normalisation between the two peoples, such peace and normalisation would still only exist to the extent that people practised it; it would not spring into being by executive fiat.

The Mas’ha camp has already registered a powerful example of the potentials of such endeavours. The encounter between Israelis and Palestinians engaging in a joint struggle against the construction of the Wall in the village became a protracted face to face encounter, where members of both communities were able to work together on a day-to-day basis, overcoming the invisible walls of isolation and stereotypes created by the occupation. For both sides, the camp was an intense experience of equality and togetherness, which by extension could create a model for future efforts (Shalabi and Medicks 2003):

Nazeeh: We wanted to show that the Israeli people are not our enemies; to provide an opportunity for Israelis to cooperate with us as good neighbors and support our struggle...Our camp showed that peace will not be built by walls and separation, but by cooperation and communication between the two peoples living in this land. At Mas'ha Camp we lived together, ate together, and talked together 24 hours a day for four months. Our fear was never from each other, but only from the Israeli soldiers and settlers.

Oren: The young Israeli generation realizes that the world has changed. They saw the Berlin wall come down. They know that security behind walls is illusionary. Spending some time together in the camp, has proven to us all that real security lies in the acceptance of one another as equals, in respecting each other's right to live a full, free life...[we struggle] to topple walls and barriers between peoples and nations, creating a world which speaks one language – the language of equal rights and freedom.

The imagery of resistance to fences, walls and borders already has a very strong currency in anarchist and broader anti-capitalist circles. The fences erected around summits, immigrant detention centres, affluent suburbs and prisons – all have been used as symbols for broader social processes such as border regimes, the enclosure of commons, restrictions on freedom of movement, the “democratic deficit” in global institutions and the stifling of dissent (Klein 2002). Meanwhile, a series of No Border protest-camps have been taking place in Europe and the U.S.-Mexico Border, under the slogan “No Human is Illegal” – and expressing an explicit rejection not only of immigration controls, but of all border regimes as such (hence, by way of veiled implication, of the state). In such a discursive environment, the Separation Wall was just asking for it. The challenge, however, is to extend this logic to the multiple fences – real and political – that segregate the Israeli and Palestinian communities on the level of everyday life.

At the crossroads of imperial conflict since Egypt and Assyria, and with a central place in the cultural legacies of the three Abrahamic religions, the land between the

Jordan river and the Mediterranean continues to be an important “acupuncture point” in the spectacle of geopolitics. Just as the reception of the Oslo agreements was emblematic of the “optimistic” attitude to globalisation of the 90s, so its collapse into renewed violence parallels the latter’s transformation into a barefaced permanent global war. The Clash of Civilisations ideology, touted in support of this war, continues to feed off the situation west of the Jordan and is thus vulnerable to a large scale proliferation of radical peacemaking. This may sound like fantasy, but the degree to which the discourse around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been radicalised in recent years should not be underestimated. The success of these movements may mean that the coming peace agreement may not generate quietude, but a flood of co-operating, disobedient publics – a bi-, multi- or post-national “community of communities” which struggles to realise itself.